

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1                   1.       A method for obtaining a postage stamp by a user system, comprising  
2 a processor, a memory, and a printer, from a website server over a communications network,  
3 said method comprising:

4                   requesting said stamp from said website server;  
5                   receiving an markup language message comprising encoded binary data  
6 representing a machine-readable portion of an indicium associated with said stamp, said  
7 indicium comprising a digital signature; and  
8                   using said print program, printing said machine-readable portion on a pre-  
9 processed label by said printer.

1                   2.       The method of claim 1 wherein said print program is downloaded from  
2 said website server and stored in said memory.

1                   3.       The method of claim 1 wherein said markup language includes a  
2 Standard Generalized Markup Language (SGML).

1                   4.       The method of claim 1 wherein said markup language includes a  
2 Hypertext Markup Language (HTML).

1                   5.       The method of claim 1 wherein said markup language includes an  
2 eXtensible Markup Language (XML).

1                   6.       The method of claim 1 wherein in said print program includes an  
2 ActiveX control.

1                   7.       The method of claim 1 wherein in said print program includes a  
2 dynamic link library(dll) file.

1                   8.       The method of claim 1 wherein in said print program does not require  
2 a license from the United States Postal Service to execute.

1                   9.       The method of claim 1 wherein in said print program does not require  
2 a separate account from the United States Postal Service to execute.

10. A method for obtaining a postage stamp by a user system, comprising a processor, a memory, and a printer, from a website server over a communications network, said method comprising:

storing a print program downloaded from said website server in said memory;  
requesting said stamp from said website server;

receiving an XML message comprising encoded binary data representing a machine-readable portion of an indicium associated with said stamp, said indicium comprising a digital signature; and

using said print program, printing said machine-readable portion on a pre-processed label by said printer.

11. The method of claim 10 wherein said markup language includes a Standard Generalized Markup Language (SGML).

12. The method of claim 10 wherein said requesting includes an XML data structure.

13. The method of claim 12 wherein said XML data structure includes a serial number that identifies said pre-processed label.

14. The method of claim 10 wherein said print program includes an AcivteX control.

15. The method of claim 10 wherein said print program is downloaded only once.

16. The method of claim 10 wherein said print program is downloaded each time a user logs into said website server.

17. The method of claim 10 wherein said encoded binary data is base 64.

18. The method of claim 10 wherein said pre-processed label has at least one of the following security features: bar-coding, micro-printing, watermarking, fluorescent strips, serrated edges, taggants, label sheet serial number, or individual label serial number.

19. The method of claim 10 wherein said XML message further comprises a meter number, a rate class, and an amount of postage.

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1                   20.     The method of claim 10 further comprising:  
2                   using said print program, printing a logo on said pre-processed label by said  
3 printer; and  
4                   using said print program, printing microprint line on said pre-processed label  
5 by said printer.

1                   21.     The method of claim 10 further comprising:  
2                   using said print program, printing said meter number on said pre-processed  
3 label by said printer;  
4                   using said print program, printing said rate class on said pre-processed label  
5 by said printer; and  
6                   using said print program, printing said amount of postage on said pre-  
7 processed label by said printer.

1                   22.     A computer program product stored in a computer readable medium  
2 for obtaining a postage stamp by a user system, comprising a processor, a memory, and a  
3 printer, from a website server over a communications network, said computer program  
4 product comprising:  
5                   code for requesting said stamp from said website server;  
6                   code for receiving an XML message, said XML message comprising encoded  
7 binary data representing a machine-readable portion of an indicium associated with said  
8 stamp, said indicium comprising a digital signature; and  
9                   code for printing said machine-readable portion on a pre-processed label by  
10 said printer.

1                   23.     The computer program product of claim 22 wherein said code for  
2 requesting comprises an XML data structure.

1                   24.     The computer program product of claim 22 wherein said XML  
2 message further comprises a postal rate class.

1                   25.     A system for obtaining a postage stamp from a central server via a  
2 communication network, comprising:  
3                   a memory;

4 a processor coupled to said memory for sending a user request for said postage  
5 stamp in a markup language format to said central server;  
6 a software module stored in said memory for extracting an indicium from a  
7 markup language message received in response to said user request, said indicium including a  
8 digital signature;  
9 a printer for printing said indicium on a pre-processed label.

1 26. The system of claim 25 wherein markup language is XML.

1 27. The system of claim 25 wherein markup language is SGML.

1 28. The system of claim 25 wherein markup language is HTML

1 29. The system of claim 25 wherein said software module includes an  
2 ActiveX control.

1 30. The system of claim 25 wherein said software module includes a  
2 print.dll.

1 31. The system of claim 25 wherein said indicium further comprising a  
2 serial number.

1 32. The system of claim 25 wherein said pre-processed label has at least  
2 one of the following security features: bar-coding, micro-printing, watermarking, fluorescent  
3 strips, serrated edges, taggants, label sheet serial number, or individual label serial number.